DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 190 FL 025 290

AUTHOR	Francis, Caryn
TITLE	Talk to Me! The Development of Request Strategies in Non-Native Speakers of English.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	20p.; For the serial issue as a whole, see FL 025 288.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT	Working Papers in Educational Linguistics; v13 n2 p23-40 Fall 1997
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; *Classroom Communication; College Students; *English (Second Language); Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; *Language Patterns; Language Proficiency; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; *Pragmatics; Second Language Learning; Student Characteristics; Time Factors (Learning)
IDENTIFIERS	Requests

ABSTRACT

A study examined the development of pragmatic competence in second language learners, focusing on the requests produced by adult non-native speakers (NNSs) of English across three settings (a university public administrative office, the private office of a university program officer, and an English as a Second Language classroom) and nine levels of English proficiency. Subjects were 29 university students with varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds, lengths of English study, durations of stay in the United States, educational goals, and age. Data tokens were coded and reviewed using speech act analysis. Results suggest a fan- shaped pattern of pragmatic development wherein NNSs continually rely on direct request strategies until their proficiency and competence begin to gradually open, whereupon they begin to use more complex request strategies. (Contains 15 references.) (Author)

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Talk to Me!
The Development of Request Strategies In Non-Native Speakers of English

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Talk to Me! The Development of Request Strategies in Non-Native Speakers of English

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The study presented in this paper examines the development of pragmatic competence in second language learners. It focuses on requests produced by adult non-native speakers of English across three different settings and nine levels of English proficiency. Data tokens were coded and reviewed utilizing speech act analysis (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989). The analysis suggests a fan shaped pattern of pragmatic development wherein NNSs continually rely upon direct request strategies until their proficiency and competence begin to gradually "open", whereupon they begin to use more complex request strategies.

Linguists and teachers alike have long been aware of the difference between knowing how to form an utterance in a language and being able to use that statement in an effective and efficient manner. The latter ability may be described as communicative or pragmatic competence. While largely unconscious in native speakers (NS), the development of communicative competence requires a great deal of time, effort, and experience from non-native speakers (NNS). For this, as well as other reasons, many individuals have examined this fundamental aspect of language acquisition (see Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986; Ellis 1992; Ervin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert, & Bell 1987; Kasper & Schmidt 1996; Rintell & Mitchell 1989). Cohen (1996) addressed the question of a specific developmental path related to communicative competence. Potential interference from a person's first language (L1) and culture has likewise been addressed by Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989), Ellis (1992), and Kasper & Schmidt (1996). Billmyer (1990) analyzed the facilitating effect of instruction on learners' emerging communicative competence. Perhaps what remains to be seen is whether an individual can ever truly get inside the culture of their second language in a way which permits the ease and grace of communication exemplified by their native-speaking peers.

The following investigation adds to the limited amount of work on the development of pragmatic competence in second language learners. It ex-

amines the use of requests by learners across a variety of settings and proficiency levels in order to identify potential patterns of development. This work is important for several reasons. According to Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989), even advanced second language learners regularly make pragmatic errors with regard to the level of politeness or illocutionary force of their utterances. In an increasingly international world, second language skills are fast becoming a necessity for many. These skills will be called upon in a variety of situations, each with its own hidden or small 'c' culture rules. Knowledge of these norms is instrumental in working towards painless and successful communicative interactions. By studying the development of such skills, we may be able to better modify second language curricula to enhance such learning.

The Literature

A concept which is inherently linked to any request realization is politeness. According to Brown & Levinson (1978:70-71), requests are face-threatening acts (FTAs). Requests place both speaker and hearer's face at risk, but especially impose on an addressee's negative face, or freedom to act without impediment. As such, they require certain adjustments or politeness moves which preserve the addressee's face. These adjustments will relate to issues of power, rank, and social distance and require a shared knowledge base of acceptable behavior and expectations. Strategies for achieving this outcome include hedging or questioning, showing deference, apologizing, and impersonalizing (Brown & Levinson 1978:150, 183, 192, 195). Such moves can often be realized via conventional indirectness or idiomatic, culture-specific utterances which convey the speaker's intent while minimizing the imposition (Brown & Levinson 1978:75). However, one must have the aforementioned pragmatic knowledge or competence in order to successfully employ such a strategy.

Searle did some of the earliest work on requests when he posited his speech act category of directives. He described these as acts intending to "get the hearer to do something . . . ." (Searle 1976:11). More recent investigation has broadened Searle's linguistic criterion, however, and shown that a speech act's illocutionary force is greatly determined by its context, not its verb. Wolfson (1989) noted that social distance and power relationships between interlocutors greatly influences the form a request takes. Other factors such as shared expectations and socio-cultural knowledge are also likely to determine the outcome of a communicative interaction (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986; Rintell & Mitchell 1989). Ervin-Tripp, et al. (1987) found that children across cultures relied on contextual inference when interpreting adults' requests rather than attending to the literal utterance.

Evidence has been cited which asserts that NNS speakers at or above intermediate proficiency do have access to the same request strategies as NS (Faerch & Kasper 1989; Kasper & Schmidt 1996). Yet their communica-

tive behavior does not seem to demonstrate this knowledge. Instead, certain limited patterns of usage seem to recur in their interactions. There is disagreement over which strategy seems to be used most commonly. Some studies assert that direct statements are most prominent (Ellis 1992) while others claim the conventionally indirect form is (Faerch & Kasper 1989). Proficiency is seen to play a role, however, in the frequency and context of requests (Kasper & Schmidt 1996). Additionally, researchers have identified a NNS tendency towards verbosity (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986; Faerch & Kasper 1989) and use of more external than internal modifications to requests (Ellis 1992).

Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989) conducted a seminal study on non-native (NNS) speaker pragmatics, known as the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). Their research utilized discourse-completion tasks to assess pragmatic strategies across cultures and languages. They found that cultural factors interact with situational factors to influence speech act performance. The two primary cross-cultural differences specific to requests identified in their analysis were level of directness and amount and type of modifications made to request forms (Blum-Kulka, et al. 1989:24). They categorized nine common strategies, each related to degree of directness, which occurred across their corpus. Namely, these are mood derivable, explicit performative, hedged performative, locution derivable, want statement, suggestory formula, preparatory, strong hint, and mild hint (Blum-Kulka, et al. 1989:278-280). Descriptions of these strategies, which are used as the basis for the analysis undertaken herein, are presented in the next section.

The Study

The study presented in this paper is an attempt to examine requests as they are produced in different settings by second language learners of English along a continuum of proficiency levels. In light of the existing literature, I will attempt to identify patterns which occur across three specific settings within a particular population of ESL students. It is expected that less proficient students will exhibit less elaborate request strategies regardless of the context, but that situational factors such as role-relationship and contextually-based assumptions will influence the levels of directness observed across levels as well as the persistence of request behavior. An analysis will then be conducted in order to specify potential developmental patterns in second language learners' pragmatic competence in the use of requests.

The data for this study were collected in three different settings[1]. All three were contained within English language programs based at two private universities. Both universities were located within the same neigh-

[1]The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Nancy Bell, Keiko Nonaka, and Lisa Tysen to the data corpus analyzed in this study.

borhood of an East coast inner-city. The breakdown of settings may be illustrated as follows:

University A	University B
Setting 1 - public office	Setting 2 - classroom
Setting 3 - private office	

While there are notable similarities between these settings, each had its own purpose and inherent expectations of interaction.

Setting 1 was a public administrative office where both program staff and students would go to obtain general information, carry out administrative business, and occasionally make appointments or contact others. Therefore, this setting could be viewed as a place of public, school-related transactions facilitated by the office staff at the request of others. The office staff primarily consisted of three middle-aged members, two women and one man, who were native speakers of English. As such, their elevated status and power over students is moderately pronounced. Other part-time staff were also present throughout the week.

Setting 3 is an interesting contrast to this in purpose and locus of control. Setting 3 was the private office of the program advisor at University A. Students would make appointments to meet with the program advisor in order to discuss personal difficulties or conflicts with their schedules. The advisor was a middle-aged woman who is also a NS of English. Her position is notably higher ranking than that of the students. Advisement sessions were conducted in her private office. Such situations required that students be able to explain their circumstances to the advisor and negotiate a resolution with her. Often times this necessitated an elaborate, clearly thought out set of reasons in support of their request.

Setting 2 was an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. The focus of the class in question was pronunciation. The teacher was a female graduate student who was in many ways a contemporary of her students. As such, the status and social distance between the teacher and class was minimal. There were 9 students enrolled and the atmosphere was generally casual and familiar. In this sense, the environment might be described as semi-private. That is, although students interacted in the presence of others, these were familiar others. In addition, they had a shared purpose of learning English. Therefore, the inherent risk and pressures of public interaction may have been substantially reduced.

The participants in the study were all adult students of ESL. They represented a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, length of English study, duration of stay in the United States, educational goals, and age. Their English language skills had been evaluated by their host programs

[1] When specific sub-section ranking was not available, participants were categorized as general.

and, for the purpose of this study, will be classified along a continuum of elementary to advanced, sub-divided into low, middle, high and general.[2] These rankings were used as indicators of proficiency for the purpose of this study. Proficiency levels of participants in Settings 2 and 3 were provided with the data collected by my colleagues. Proficiency levels of students observed in Setting 1 were provided by office staff according to student records. It should be noted that while a range of skill levels was observed in Settings 1 and 3, the participants in Setting 2 were all high-elementary. A total of twenty-nine participants was included in the analysis.[3]

Table 1
Number of participants by setting & level

Level	Elementary				Intermediate				Adv.	Total
Setting	Low	Mid	High	Gen.	Low	Mid	High	Gen.		
1-Public Office Office	1	3	1	1	1	0	1	6	1	15
2-Classroom	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
3-Advisor's Office	1	1	0	0	2	4	2	0		10
TOTAL	2	4	5	1	3	4	3	6	1	29

As many of these students produced more than one request each, the total number of requests analyzed was greater than the number of participants. Fifty-five requests were analyzed in total.

Table 2
Total number of requests by setting & level

Setting	Public Office	Classroom	Advisor's Office	Total
No. of requests	17	9	29	55

Data collection occurred via non-participant and participant naturalistic observation, audio recording, and some video recording. The data from the public office were recorded by hand by the author over a six week period. The interactions were observed in the waiting area of the office approximately three times a week for periods of 60-90 minutes, generally

[3] Students who were observed but did not produce requests were not included in the analysis.

around mid-day. The classroom data were recorded by the class teacher using audio, and occasionally video-tape. She then transcribed the taped material. Data from the advisor's private office were audio-recorded by the advisor and transcribed by two of my colleagues who were not present ough sweeps were made through each data set in an attempt to ensure consistent coding as there was no co-rater to allow for inter-rater reliability. Each request token was coded for speaker characteristics (gender, country of origin, English language skill) and sociolinguistic features (level of directness, alerter, supporting moves, strategy, downgraders, upgraders, perspective, propositional completeness, linguistic completeness,). Several of these categories are based on those used in the CCSARP project as listed below (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper 1989:18, 273-294).

Levels of Directness

Direct

A request was coded as a directive if its meaning was directly determinable from its linguistic content alone.

Conventionally Indirect

An utterance was described as conventionally indirect if its meaning was interpreted through its linguistic content in conjunction with contextual cues.

Non-conventionally Indirect

A request was considered non-conventionally indirect if its illocutionary force was dependent upon contextual inference.

Components of Requests

Alerter

A verbal call for attention.

Head Act

The smallest unit of an utterance which conveys a request.

Supporting Moves

External additions to the request head-act which frame it in a mitigating manner.

Request Strategies

Mood Derivable

The grammatical nature or manner of the utterance communicates the most direct request possible.

Want Statement

The utterance expresses the speaker's desire for something.

Preparatory

The speaker's request includes a prefacing condition along with the actual embedded request.

Hints

Particularly indirect requests which are realized as suggestions.

They may be strong or weak, depending on the presence of an allusion to the topic of the request.

Request Modifiers

Downgraders

Modifications to the request head act internally which reduce its illocutionary force. These may be syntactic or lexical in nature.

Upgraders

Modifications to the request which intensify its illocutionary force.

Additionally, the following three categories have been modified or added for the purpose of this study:

Aspects of Requests

Perspective

Hearer: the utterance is from the addressee's perspective
Speaker: the utterance is from the speaker's perspective
Neutral: the utterance is from neither interlocutor's perspective

Propositional Completeness

A request was considered proportionally complete if the addressee understood its intent without further negotiation of meaning.

Linguistic Completeness

An utterance was considered linguistically complete if it contained the request verb. Tokens frequently lacked prepositions and object pronouns but were considered complete for this analysis if they met the above criterion.

Once the data were coded, it was entered into a spread-sheet and analyzed for patterns by settings and proficiency levels. A qualitative interpretation was then applied to more fully consider aspects of particular situations which may influence such patterns.

Results and Discussion

The most striking result of the analysis was the preponderance of proportionally and linguistically complete directives. This held true across settings and skill levels. A total of 38 directives was recorded from the 55 utterances analyzed (Setting 1=12, Setting 2=5, Setting 3=21). This represents 69% of all the requests observed(Table 3a). While individual students produced multiple request tokens in all settings, the majority of directives took place in the advisor's office. The most probable explanation for this is the specific nature of advising interactions. Eighty-four percent of directives were phrased as want statements from the speaker's perspective (Table 3b).

Those directives which were not want statements were mood derivable, with the exception of two possible preparatory statements and another propositionally incomplete sentence which relied on inference for comprehension.

Table 3a
Number of directives across settings & levels

Level	Elementary				Intermediate				Adv.	Total
Setting	Low	Mid	High	Gen.	Low	Mid	High	Gen.		
1-Public Office Office	0	4	1	1	1	0	1	3	1	12/17
2-Classroom	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5/9
3-Advisor's Office	3	5	0	0	2	10	1	0	0	21/29

Table 3b
Number of want statement directives across settings & levels

Level	Elementary				Intermediate				Adv.	Total
Setting	Low	Mid	High	Gen.	Low	Mid	High	Gen.		
1-Public Office Office	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	9/12
2-Classroom	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2/5
3-Advisor's Office	3	4	0	0	2	10	1	0	0	21/21

Two of these instances occurred in Setting 1. The first was said by a Korean male at the mid-intermediate level. He approached a member of the office staff and inquired:

S:"I, register next session, can I?"

Although the "want" is omitted from this statement, it is possible that this is the intended meaning based on the syntactic structure of the main clause. In this instance, the "can I" functions as a tag question. However, an alternative explanation is that the student is attempting to form a preparatory interrogative but is unable to complete the necessary syntactic inversion. The result is intriguing as it may be interpreted somewhere between a directive and a conventionally indirect request. These categories represent two different degrees of politeness and therefore may realistically influence the outcome of the request. The staff member here treated this request

as unmarked, or normative, and the interaction proceeded smoothly.

The second example illustrates the prominence of inference and context on comprehension of a message. Here, a beginning level male Korean makes eye contact with an office staff member and the following ensues:

S is the student, E is the employee

S: "Penn schedule."
E: "Penn schedule?"
S: "1997."
E: "For the University or English Language Program?"
S:"English Language Program."
E: "Okay. I'll get it for you."

While further negotiation is necessary for clarity, it is obvious from this instance that the importance of contextual inference cannot be underrated. The public office stocks administrative materials, including schedules, and this interaction took place around registration time. Therefore, this request is correctly presumed to fall under the hot topic of "desperately seeking registration information". From this assumption, the staff member is able to move forward with more specific queries in order to ascertain which exact schedule the student wants. The degree of politeness attached to the utterance must also be inferred. Cues such as gesture, tone, and expression support such inference.

A similar interaction was recorded in Setting 2. Here the request is in a minimal form which linguistically resembles a mood derivable command. Yet intonational patterns and non-verbal cues reduce the directness of this utterance to that of a preparatory interrogative.

S is the student, T is the teacher

S: "Check this?"(Said while presenting the paper with a pleading expression.)
T:"Sure!"

The request is accepted as appropriate behavior despite its lack of explicit politeness markers. This may be due to the classroom atmosphere and the teacher's attitude. She maintains an informal relationship with her students and, in many ways, is their peer. Therefore, no strong distinction between rank, social status, distance or age exists here which would necessitate increased deference or politeness (Wolfson 1989:93).

The above interactions illustrate the influence of context on requests as noted by several researchers (Ervin-Tripp 1976; Ervin-Tripp, et al. 1987; Rintell & Mitchell 1989). Ervin-Tripp, et al. (1987) found that as requests are typically inferred from context, even incomplete or isolated utterances are commonly understood. This effect is illustrated by my data. Part of this inference relates to role-relationships (Ervin-Tripp 1976), defined by Fishman (1971:243) as accepted mutual rights and obligations between individuals. Such roles are also situation specific. Part of a teacher's role in

the US is to check students' work, just as it is part of the office staff's role to provide information. Therefore, it is the shared expectations of context, coupled with verbal and non-verbal cues which enable both of these requests to be successfully realized.

On further examination, the classroom setting results do present a notable difference from the other two in frequency of directive strategy use. While the same strategies are used, the mood derivable is equally prominent to the want statement in this setting. Closer inspection reveals a change from the usual classroom atmosphere which may have encouraged these instances of directness. They were recorded at the last session during which a party was being held. It seems likely that the party reduced the usual level of contextual formality, thus permitting such direct orders between students as well as from students to the teacher. In addition, one of these utterances was offered as an invitation to others to help themselves to food. Although linguistically a command, *"Eat!"* in this context may be interpreted with less force because of its accompanying para-linguistic gestures and its function of pleasing rather than imposing on others.

Far fewer students used conventionally indirect request forms. The most occurred in the advisor's office setting, followed by the public office, with the least in the classroom. All of these requests utilized interrogatives in a preparatory strategy, regardless of setting or level. The perspective taken was more equally distributed, although the speaker perspective was still more common. In addition, multiple request tokens can again be attributed to individual students. However, this is not as pronounced as in the case of directives.

Table 4
Number of conventionally indirect requests across settings & levels

Level	Elementary				Intermediate				Adv.	Total
Setting	Low	Mid	High	Gen.	Low	Mid	High	Gen.		
1-Public Office Office		1						2		3/17
2-Classroom			2							2/9
3-Advisor's Office					1	3	1			5/29

The degree of imposition related to each of the settings may mirror the frequency of this request strategy. The topic matter of requests in the advisor's office is far more specific than in the public office. It requires of the advisor detailed and time-consuming actions on the direct behalf of the student as a result of unusual or extreme circumstances. In addition,

the advisor has more power and rank relative to the office staff. The simple fact that an appointment is required before one can see her implicitly communicates this standing. In comparison, the public office is a readily available resource for all students. In most cases, the information and materials provided are standard. An explanation regarding the classroom setting is not as transparent. Although a teacher may often experience ample imposition while meeting the requests of her students, this is perhaps not perceived by them. In this particular class, the aforementioned role-relationship and proficiency of the students are also likely to be influential factors.

Non-conventionally indirect requests were extremely rare in the data. There were only seven instances out of a possible fifty-five. Three of these were produced by one student and on the whole, non-conventionally indirect requests took the neutral perspective with greater frequency than the other two levels of directness. Six of the seven were realized as strong hints, with the seventh a weak hint.

Table 5
Number of non-conventionally indirect requests across settings & levels

Level	Elementary				Intermediate				Adv.	Total
Setting	Low	Mid	High	Gen.	Low	Mid	High	Gen.		
1-Public Office Office	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	9/12
2-Classroom	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2/5
3-Advisor's Office	3	4	0	0	2	10	1	0	0	21/21

This result is similar to Ervin-Tripp (1976) which found hints to be more prominent within families or communal groups. The greatest proportion of hints reported here are in the classroom which is a form of communal group. Ervin-Tripp (1976) also asserts that hints occur when their intent is clear because of contextual factors, such as roles and obligations, and the speaker anticipates a significant imposition on the listener which they do not wish to explicitly express. This is representative of interactions with the advisor.

As anticipated, supporting moves were the most distinguishing aspect of the analysis. Interestingly though, this distinction appears to vary with setting and not level. Furthermore, supporting moves were the only category of analysis wherein conversationally permissible multiple moves were actually taken. These all occurred in the advisor's office setting. In

one instance, five moves were recorded for one request. The results for supporting moves are summarized below.

Table 6
Summary of supporting moves across settings 7 levels

Setting	Level	Individual Requests	Supporting Moves per Requests
1	General Intermediate	1	1
2	High Elementary	1	1
3	Low Elementary	1	1
"	Mid-Elementary	2	1
"	"	1	2
"	"	1	3
"	"	1	5
"	High-Elementary	0	0
"	Low-Intermediate	1	2
		1	4
"	Mid-Intermediate	5	1
		1	4
"	High-Intermediate	1	1
		1	3

The supporting moves recorded were all grounders, or reasons, which mitigated the students' requests. Unsurprisingly, they generally occurred in the advisor's office where such explication was necessary in order for a request to be considered. Along a similar vein, the other two settings require less explanation by nature.

However, two instances were observed in the public office wherein pragmatic failure did occur. According to Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1986:168), pragmatic failure occurs ". . . whenever a speaker fails to live up to his interlocutor's expectations . . ." of socio-culturally appropriate behavior. The first involved a mid-elementary level Korean female who had come into the office to register for the TOEFL exam.

S is the student, E is the employee

S: Excuse me, I wanna test.

E: TOEFL test?

S: Yes.

(After completing the necessary paperwork and walking away from the service counter, the student suddenly turns around and quickly runs back to the counter where the staff member is still standing.)

S: Let me have my . . . ID! (Laughing)

E: Oh! Sorry! (Returns ID and laughs)

The student's initial request reflects a lack of linguistic skill but an awareness of want statements as a request strategy. However, her sudden concern about not having her ID may have further limited her ability to produce it in the second half of this interaction. Instead, she uses an inappropriate command. Luckily, her joking manner seems to imply that she does not wish to express such a forceful directive. Under different circumstances such an imperative could result in serious consequences for this student. As is, her exclamation caught the staff member off guard. However, it appears as though a desire to save face from his error, an awareness of the student's linguistic skills, and the general informality of the setting allow this pragmatic failure to go unacknowledged.

The second instance is an enlightening contrast to this example. The student was a male Korean who appeared to have high intermediate English skills. He had come to the office to inquire about a previous situation with which a staff member had assisted him. The staff member asked the student if he had followed through with the necessary measures explained to him during the student's prior visit. After ascertaining that he had not, the staff member dialed a phone number and handed the receiver to the waiting student. As the student conversed, the staff member sat down and became involved in a conversation with another colleague. The student then interrupted this conversation.

S is the student, E is the employee

S: David, uh thank you very much. (Said while holding out phone receiver)

E: She's finished? (Said with a look of startled surprise and annoyance)

S:(Shakes head in an affirmative manner)

E:(Takes phone receiver from student)

Here the student's attempt at a mild hint combined with an expression of gratitude fails miserably. His intrusion is poorly timed and seems to be perceived as rude. As described in Blum-Kulka, et al. (1989), despite a high level of linguistic skill, the pragmatic knowledge with which it must be applied appears to be lacking.

A particularly fascinating display of linguistic and communicative competence was also recorded in the public office. A female Japanese student at the mid-elementary level wanted to check the program class schedule but had difficulty expressing herself. After three failed attempts, she makes a surprising switch in strategy which is quite unexpected in light of the earlier utterances.

S is the student, E is the employee

S: I need to something. (Pause)
S: I want to . . . (Pause).
(Staff member waiting.)
S: I want to time . . .
E: Time?
S: Could you show me the time?
E: The class time? Do you have your PennCard?

This change in strategy represents a move to a more complex, indirect approach to the interaction. In addition, it is one of only two such conventionally indirect requests produced by elementary level participants in the entire corpus. It is anomalous for a more striking reason, however. The student is unable to complete the linguistically simpler head-act, yet manages to clearly and accurately express a much more intricate syntactic pattern seconds later without any external prompting. The only explanation for this phenomenon which seems feasible is the use of a memorized, formulaic expression. Such use, according to earlier research, is a means of acquiring pragmatic knowledge (Kasper & Schmidt 1996). Indeed, Ellis (1992) found his young elementary level subjects used formulaic utterances to express formality. This conclusion is further supported by the remainder of the interaction, which was negotiated by the staff member as he pointed to individual classes on a printed list while asking the student "yes or no". The student's responses were limited to head-nodding and a simple yes or no.

Although there was little variety in strategies used for achieving requests, there was a clear absence of downgraders in the utterances of lower level students, as anticipated. This anticipation is based upon the linguistic complexity of such moves. Similar to non-conventionally indirect requests, syntactic and lexical downgraders appeared only eight times in the corpus. In addition, they occurred exclusively of one another. Intermediate students produced these utterances. One was in the public office setting with the remainder taking place in the advisor's office. None appeared

in the classroom setting which is not unexpected as those students were all at the high-elementary level. There were no instances of upgraders in the corpus.

Table 7
Number of syntactic and lexical downgraders across settings

Level	Intermediate				
Setting	Low	Mid	High	Gen.	Total
1-Public Office				1 syn.	1 syn.
2-Adivor's Office	1 syn	4 syn 1 lex	1 lex		5 syn 2 lex

When analyzed for perspective, a very strong trend appeared. The speaker perspective was taken in 42 out of 55 tokens, or 76% of the time. All proficiency levels are represented within this pattern. However, the distribution across settings was not uniform. In both office settings, over 70% of requests fell into this category (Setting 1=71%, Setting 3=86%). Approximately another 10% of tokens from each of these settings came from a neutral perspective. In contrast, requests recorded in the classroom setting were split almost equally between speaker (56%) and hearer (44%) perspectives. There is, however, a recognizable difference between the use of hearer perspective in the office settings. While 18% of the utterances from the public office held the hearer perspective, only 3% in the advisor's office did the same.

Again, contextual demands may explain these variations. Students are likely to explain their circumstances and desires in terms of their own perspective when in the position of justifying these to the advisor. The preponderance of speaker perspective in general fits with the finding of abundant want statements in the corpus.

The remaining categories of alerters and propositional and linguistic completeness were not particularly revealing. Alerters were confined to Settings 1 and 2 and limited in frequency. Only 15% of recorded requests utilized these markers. This is not surprising, however, given the contexts of these interactions. Alerters would not be expected in the advisor's office as the students concerned have previously arranged appointments and typically respond to the advisor's opening move inquiring about their problem. Students used these devices to attract the attention of the teacher in the classroom setting when she was working with other students or when they interrupted her to express interest in something she said. Similarly, if office staff were otherwise occupied when students needed help, they would

use an alerter. *"Excuse me"* was the most common phrase used, although "hi" was used occasionally and a staff member was once called by name.

No less than 75% of utterances in any setting were propositionally or linguistically complete. Only four requests were linguistically and not propositionally complete. Two of these occurred in the public office and the other two in the advisor's office. The same exact pattern occurred for four requests which were incomplete for both categories. Lastly, all requests which were propositionally complete were also linguistically complete.

Summary & Conclusions

The findings of this study support the original hypothesis linking complexity of request strategies to level of second language proficiency in adult second language learners of English. It found a preponderance of directives (69%) over conventionally indirect (18%) and non-conventionally indirect (13%) requests in the corpus. This reflects earlier findings by Ellis (1992). In addition, preferences discovered here for want statements, preparatory interrogatives, and hints have similarly been identified in the literature (Kasper & Schmidt 1996).

The largest differences between the groups studied appeared to be linked to setting. This seems to demonstrate students' sensitivity to context and role-relationships. While there was evidence of more polite strategies among from contextual prompts and demands rather than from efforts at deference. The most striking difference between settings is reflected in the distribution of less direct requests. The classroom findings are more equally divided between these categories than in either office. This may be due to a greater variety of interactions in this setting.

Table 8
Summary of request tokens within setting & across levels

	Level of Directness		
Setting	Directives	Conventionally Indirect	Non-Conventionally Indirect
1-Public Office	12/17=71%	3/17=18%	2/17=12%
2-Classroom	5/9=56%	2/9=22%	2/9=22%
3-Advisor's Office	21/29=72%	5/9=17%	3/29=10%

Total percentages are approximately 100 due to rounding.

A further finding of interest is related to proficiency level and therefore potentially to development. Comparable frequencies for directives and non-conventionally indirect requests exist between the elementary and intermediate levels. However, the percentage of *conventionally indirect* requests made by intermediate students (24%) was twice that of elementary students (12%). This finding supports the notion of greater pragmatic development in more advanced learners, illustrated by their use of more linguistically and pragmatically complex strategies. It equally emphasizes a more *diversified* use of strategies by these individuals. In comparing intermediate with elementary level learners, a fan pattern of pragmatic development can be imagined whereby less proficient learners rely upon direct schemes consistently and then gradually open up their repertoires to make use of those which are less direct.

Table 9
Summary of request tokens within level & across settings

Level	Level of Directness		
	Directives	Conventionally Indirect	Non-Conventionally Indirect
Elementary	19/25=76%	3/25=12%	3/25=12%
Intermediate	18/29=62%	7/29=24%	4/29=14%

As there as only one advanced participant, this level is not included in the summary.

It appears as though students who are sufficiently linguistically proficient make appropriate efforts to follow politeness norms. It is not possible to ascertain from this study whether this pragmatic knowledge is acquired through experience or instruction. It seems probable, however, that many variables are involved. As such, a language curriculum which offers authentic materials and ample opportunities to participate in a wide variety of social situations will surely support students' experiences outside the classroom and foster greater learning and confidence.

Several drawbacks to the present study should be addressed by future work. These include a limited time frame and sample, restricted data collection methods, and lack of baseline data for comparison. While the observations made herein illustrate a degree of developing pragmatic knowledge, additional research on such patterns by age, gender, length of utterance, and culture will surely shed further light on this particularly important area.

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